GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:3599
ANSWERED ON:23.12.2008
RESUMPTION OF WTO TALK
Botcha Lakshmi Smt. Jhansi

Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks which broke down in July due to differences on major issues will be resumed in future;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the Government is going to tackle at the next round of WTO talks, the core issues relating to special safeguard mechanism for developing countries, treatment of sensitive farm products in industrialized countries, cotton and the sectoral tariff elimination for industrial products; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY(SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH)

(a) and (b): Following the impasse in the talks at the mini-Ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) held in July 2008, the general opinion amongst WTO members was that the negotiations should resume at the earliest opportunity. The multilateral process of discussions at the WTO resumed in October 2008 on both Agriculture and Non-Agricultural Market Access (NAMA) issues. Based on these discussions, the Chairmen of the respective Negotiating Groups brought out revised draft modalities on 6 December 2008. Another Ministerial-level engagement was tentatively planned to be held in December 2008. The Director General of the WTO subsequently recommended against it, in the absence of the "political drive" for a final push towards agreement.

(c) and (d): There are a large number of unresolved issues in both Agriculture and NAMA, including the Special Safeguard Mechanism, cotton subsidies, Sensitive Products, tariff capping, tariff simplification etc. in Agriculture and Sectoral Initiatives in NAMA on which further negotiations would have to be held. Substantial and effective reductions in domestic support and import tariffs by developed countries, while enabling developing countries to protect and promote the interests of their low income and resource poor farmers is a key priority for India and other developing countries in the agriculture negotiations. On sectoral initiatives for industrial products, India's negotiating position has been that participation must be on a non-mandatory and good faith basis without pre-judging the outcome.